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ABSTRACT

The Windham (Vermont) Partnership, a professional development school, cooperates with a Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program that educates foreign language and English as a Second Language teachers. Within the Partnership, there are two seminars for mentors: the Reflective Teaching Seminar and the Teacher Research Seminar. Teachers are encouraged to examine issues related to teaching and learning in their classrooms, mentoring students, and their own participation in schools. This study focuses on both of these seminars and is based on field notes from interviews with four participants in the program. Findings indicate that teachers' thinking is significantly affected in two ways: first, their actual thinking process has evolved into a more rigorous, more reflective way of thinking; and second, their thinking has resulted in insights into and specific strategies for solving problems and a heightened sense of perspective. A sense of community and support has been an important element in this partnership, especially important in a rural community setting. A table is appended with statistics on participation in the partnership. (JLS)

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Teacher Thinking and The Windham Partnership Reflective Teaching Seminars

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Teacher Thinking and The Windham Partnership Reflective Teaching Seminars

Introduction

This paper provides a preliminary look at how the thinking of teacher involved in the Windham partnership Reflective Teaching Seminars were affected by those seminars.

The Windham Partnership is a unique Professional Development School dedicated to the improvement of foreign language instruction and to the advancement of multi-cultural education in rural Vermont. It provides students from the School for International Training's (SIT) Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program the opportunity to participate in a collaborative enterprise that integrates their course work with actual classroom teaching in public schools, enabling participating teachers in the public schools to diversify the education of children and to grow professionally. Graduate faculty consider the collaborative an important means of integrating the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in the MAT program with the skills practiced, and the insights gained on a daily basis in the classroom.

Within the Partnership there exist two seminars for Mentors, the Reflective Teaching Seminar and the Teacher Research Seminar. In these seminars, mentor teachers raise and examine issues related to teaching and learning in their classrooms, mentoring student teachers, and their participation in their schools. The Seminars provide, in the words of one mentor teacher, "a window for gathering strength" in the face of the

relentless complexity of their work as teachers and teacher educators. The work that goes on in these seminars is the focus of this study. In order to understand this work fully, however, it is necessary to give the reader some background information on the Partnership itself.

Factors in the Success of the Partnership

Origins

One cannot talk about the Windham Partnership without talking about its origins. The deep roots of the project owe their health to the way in which the Partnership was conceived and developed. The Windham Partnership was started in 1991 as a collaboration among three different groups: parents from the greater Brattleboro, Vt. community, the faculty of the School for International Training's Master of Arts in Teaching program, and teachers from three local schools: the faculty of the foreign language department of the local high school, and three teachers from two Brattleboro area elementary schools. We were assisted by Kitty Boles, and , later, Vivian Troen, the founders of the Learning-Teaching Cooperative of Brookline, Mass. The goals of the Partnership are: to give Brattleboro children an in-depth and varied exposure to foreign languages and cultures, to introduce student teachers to the full complexity of public elementary and secondary schools, and to give mentor teachers the opportunity to expand their work to include teacher education and supervision.

Today the Partnership includes 10 schools from eight surrounding towns and four separate districts. The 10 schools include two regional high schools and eight elementary schools. There are currently 17 mentor teachers, including six high school language teachers and 11 elementary school teachers. (See fig. 1) The average number of years teaching experience

among these teachers is 21, with an impressive total of nearly 400 years of experience. Of the nine teachers who started with the Partnership six years ago, five are still active. (The other four have retired, left teaching, or left because of time constraints.) The other 12 teachers who have joined since 1992 have all stayed with the program. This year there are seven new teachers.

The Windham Partnership is, perhaps, unique among Professional Development School efforts in that it involved teachers, parents and graduate faculty in its planning and design from the very beginning. As I will show shortly, mentors are highly invested in their work, due in large part to this early involvement.

As a result of teachers' being integral to the project, and having equal power within it, they have experienced an empowerment not always characteristic of cooperating teachers. Mentor teachers feel empowered in three distinct ways: first, they were included from the start in the planning of the Partnership and assumed equal powers of decision making; second, they were listened to and deferred to as experts in their own teaching and their own teaching contexts; and third, they were treated with respect by the collaborators (the MAT program, parents, and administrators) who made an effort to solicit and honor their needs.[1]

Susan Johnson (1990), in her book *Teachers at Work*, writes that teachers'

> commitment to participate [in governance and other school initiatives] is closely related to an opportunity to have a real influence--being deprived of any genuine

> chance to influence policy [is] for teachers the root cause of withdrawal and cynicism. (p. 189)

To illustrate, one teacher in the Partnership recalls:

> I understood exactly what the objectives of the program were and felt that for some reason we were empowered to do this program. It wasn't something that was imposed upon us. We took the direction. I wouldn't say we took the total initiative; certainly SIT was very clearly involved in this. But being involved in the structuring of the program...empowered us to structure it the way we felt it would work best for our students and for ourselves as teachers. [JA, 3/30]

The sense of "us" (teachers) and "them" (university) was thus mitigated. A sense of "we" became critical. Maxine Greene writes of this in her essay *The Question of Personal Reality* (1978):

> I am suggesting that a concern for personal reality cannot be divorced from a concern for cooperative action within some sort of community. It is when teachers are together as persons, according to norms and principles they have freely chosen, that interest becomes intensified and commitments are made. And this may open pathways to expanded landscapes, richer ways of being human--unique and in the "we-relation" at the same time. (p. 34)

This formation of a "we-relationship," both between the teachers and SIT, and among the teachers themselves, has been key to the mentors' satisfaction with the program, and has helped form a foundation from which the mentors could successfully negotiate the challenges they encountered. The structure of the program, described below, was developed by mentors in conjunction with the MAT faculty.

The Structure of the Partnership

The Partnership, which is co-directed by a Mentor and an MAT faculty member, exists within the larger context of the MAT program. This program educates not only foreign language (Spanish and French) teachers but also teachers of English as a second or foreign language. All foreign language majors are involved in the Partnership, but share program courses (methodology, linguistics, culture and so forth) with the ESL majors. The program lasts for one year with a major paper or a portfolio for certification capping the year of course work.

The year is divided into three sections:

- The Fall: Early in the fall, MAT foreign language interns are matched with a school and a mentor. The fall consists of course work and weekly visits to their schools. The interns observe, teach and sit in on department and school faculty meetings. They also may be involved with parent-teacher meetings. Course work includes the Intern Seminar, a three-credit course taught by a mentor and a MAT faculty member.

- The Winter: Starting in early January the interns begin their intensive internships. They are at school all day, every day and become fully involved in school culture: they teach, attend faculty meetings, parent-teacher meetings, and they write student evaluations. Many get involved with extra-curricular events. By the end of the winter internship, they will have taken over most if not all of their mentor's classes. Interns continue with the Intern Seminar.

- The Spring: Interns return to a full-time schedule as students. Many choose to teach once a week in order to maintain contact with the school, however. Due to the relationships that now exist between the intern and the school, they are able to continue to link practice to theory in a much deeper way. But this continued relationship is currently optional.

The mentors, meanwhile, are involved in their own program that runs parallel to the interns' program. Through the fall, winter and spring, they participate in the Reflective Teaching Seminar and may choose to be a

part of the credit-bearing Teacher Research Seminar. The fact that the seminars exist within the larger context of the Partnership gives them a legitimacy that other, isolated teacher study groups must struggle harder to establish. I have talked with many teachers, including those in the Partnership, who have started teacher study groups in their schools only to see them falter and fade under the pressure of other commitments. The seminars are not ends in themselves but serve the larger ends of the Partnership. Both seminars are facilitated by an MAT faculty member, and are described below.

The Reflective Teaching Seminar

The Reflective Teaching Seminar was the only seminar for the first four years of the Windham Partnership. It was and is mandatory and was credit bearing for the first four years, though not all mentors took it for credit. During the first year the seminar took the form of workshops designed to train mentors in working effectively with their interns. Mentors received input on giving effective feedback, observation, and supervision. During this first year I conducted a study" which focused on the effect of mentoring on teachers' own professional and personal development. I found that while teachers were able to articulate why the Partnership worked for them, they were less able to reflect upon and articulate their own teaching. Most of what they had to say took the form of isolated anecdotes without being connected to each other or to larger theories of teaching and learning. Since one of the goals of the MAT students' internship is to be able to reflect upon their own

teaching, and to connect their practice to the theory they had been exposed to in the MAT program, I felt it was critical that Mentors be able to do this with their own teaching. The second year of the Partnership I co-coordinated the seminar. Reflection on their own teaching became central, but was combined with continued work on mentoring skills.

There were four parts to the two-hour seminar: announcements, checking in with each mentor on how things were going with her intern (this often included trouble shooting), and a debriefing from the mentor who taught the intern seminar took up the first hour. The second hour was dedicated to the investigation of a case brought by one of the mentors, and discussion of relevant readings. Those who took the seminar for credit were obliged to present a case to the group, as well as keep a reflective journal of their teaching (to which I responded) and write a final synthesis paper. (Those who did not take the course for credit frequently took advantage of the opportunity to present a case, however.)

We have experimented with imposing themes, such as multiple intelligences, on the seminars, but this has not worked. Instead, teachers feel it is more relevant for them to bring problems or dilemmas which grow directly out of their work environment. Many problems have related directly to the classroom, but we have also seen other work-related problems -- how to manage in a challenging team-teaching relationship, how to handle a difficult administrator, or how to negotiate a complex contract situation.

The cases that teachers bring take the form of a video clip, a written narrative, student work, or other documents or artifacts that help the group get a clear view of the situation. The discussion is facilitated by the presenting mentor, with backup support from me.

While the seminars were rich and productive, we were consistently squeezed for time. Between announcements and other "business," it was difficult to demand the kind of rigor I felt a two credit course required. This year, in an effort to give enough time to both business and rigorous reflection. We have divided the seminar into two seminars: The Reflective Teaching Seminar and the Teacher Research Seminar.

The Reflective Teaching Seminar is still obligatory for all Mentors. Cases still form the core of these seminars, but there are no accompanying papers or journals. The rest of the two hours is dedicated to announcements, to checking in with Mentors about their interns, and to an up-date on the intern seminar. The check-in time, in fact, has become critical and often raises important issues that become on-the-spot mini-cases. With 17 mentors, however, the time is still very tight.

The Teacher Research Seminar

The Teacher Research Seminar is an optional, one credit course. Nine of the 17 mentors are enrolled. We meet for three hours in one teacher's home every six weeks or so, for a total of 15 hours. There is ample food, tea and coffee and sufficient time to listen to each other and assist one another clarifying processes and ideas. Topics of research this year include:

investigation of why French students choose to stop or to continue their study of French; investigation of how women teachers perceive their experience within the male dominated local school district; an investigation of how children depict objects from above, below and straight on; and, a study of students' perceptions of what good teaching is, among others.

For me, it has been a relief to be able to ask for in-depth work from teachers who want to put in the extra time.[iii] Because it is a research seminar, it also allows teachers to go into a single subject in depth, as well as to acquire some qualitative research skills. In addition, mentors can do the reading there was never time for in the other seminar. Finally, it gives teachers practice in a different, more extensive kind of reflective thinking, where the results of their thinking are made public.

This study focuses on both of these seminars. Because of the preliminary nature of the study, we have not made an attempt to separate out the kind of thinking that emerges from one seminar in contrast to the other.

The Study

Methodology

This study is only in its preliminary stages. The data for this paper comes from my own field notes, from a February interview conducted with four teachers who have been with the Partnership for between three and five years, and from an interview conducted two years ago. We have also verified conclusions by checking them with other mentors in the group. Analysis was conducted by coding the notes and transcripts and looking for emerging

themes. The coding and initial analysis were conducted by Peggy Tiffany (of Marlboro Elementary School) and myself, with follow-up analysis by the mentors in the Research Seminar.[iv]

Theoretical Frame

There exist many conceptions of reflection. For the purposes of this study I have returned to John Dewey. Dewey defines reflection as a disciplined way of thinking that involves the "reconstruction and reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases [one's] ability to direct the course of subsequent experience."[v]

Teacher education at its best, be it in-service or pre-service, educates the whole person into a way of perceiving and proceeding in the world, rather than training her to solve particular problems in particular ways. Teaching is too complex, too varied, and too uncertain for formulas or fixes. Wisdom comes from experience, but it must be experience from which meaning has been extracted -- that is, it must be experience which has been reflected upon.

The function of reflection is making meaning: formulating the "relationships and continuities" among the elements of an experience, between that experience and others, and between that experience and the knowledge that one carries.

> In discovery of the detailed connections of our activities and what happens in consequence, the thought implied in cut and try [sic] experience is made explicit. ... Hence the quality of the experience changes; the change is so significant that we may call this type of experience reflective -- that is, reflective *par excellence*.[vi]

The creation of meaning out of experience is at the very heart of what it means to be human. It is what enables us to make sense of the events of our lives. Dewey ponders,

> What avail is it to win prescribed amounts of information about geography and history, to win ability to read and write, if in the process the individual loses his own soul: loses his appreciation of things worthwhile, of the values to which these things are relative; if he loses desire to apply what he has learned and, above all, loses the ability to extract meaning from his future experiences as they occur?[vii]

An experience in and of itself has no meaning. It has meaning because of the relationships which the individual perceives. As Aldous Huxley wrote, "Experience is not what happens to you, it's what you *do* with what happens to you."[viii] Below are descriptions of the relationships and connections that mentor teachers perceived as a result of their work in the seminars.

The Findings

The study seeks to understand *how the seminars have affected teachers' thinking about their teaching, about learning and about their work in schools.* Initial findings indicate that teachers' thinking is significantly affected. It is affected in two broad ways: first, *how* they think, their actual thinking process, has evolved into a more rigorous, more reflective, way of thinking. Second, the *outcome* of their thinking has been affected. Specifically, it consists of insights into and specific strategies for solving problems, and a heightened sense of perspective. This perspective manifests itself in six distinct forms: developmental, curricular, comparative, objective,

theoretical and individual-group. This has all been facilitated by two important contextual factors: 1) a supportive community consisting of experienced teachers and an experienced facilitator, and 2) a program to which they are all accountable. A description and analysis of each of these dimensions follows below.

Process: How We (in the Seminar Discipline Ourselves to) Think

The allusion here to Dewey's seminal work, How We Think, (1933) is no accident. As Dewey suggests, we begin with a problem or question that perplexes us.[iv] This problem always arises from the teacher's practice: students who need to hear directions more than once; an intern who won't take responsibility for long-term planning; a colleague who is difficult to "team" with; a student who is unable to socialize with her peers. It has never been specified that a teacher must present a problem. Teachers simply find them more interesting. The *process* of attacking the problem is a reflective one. It begins with a presentation of the problem, and the very act of presenting it clearly begins the act of reflection. As one teacher said:

> If we as a department [of high school language teachers] want to talk about our own small micro-politics [in the seminar] we have to explain it to others. We couldn't just say "those turkeys up there [in administration]" -- we had to label it accurately. [MC Interview, 2/97]

This need to articulate a problem accurately is compounded by the fact that this teacher is a high school teacher talking to elementary school teachers who do not necessarily share her assumptions about the high school's

administration. It also forces the teacher beyond a mere emotional interpretation, and begins the process of intellectualization.[x]

This process of intellectualization also enables a teacher to begin to face the assumptions she is making, and to ask herself if they are valid. And if she doesn't ask herself, her colleagues will. "People are there doing a reality check," says one teacher. As a group we probe with the teacher, trying to uncover the assumptions underlying her interpretations. One example of an assumption that many teachers carry with them is this: a teacher can make students learn. One seventh/eight grade teacher in the research seminar wanted to know how she could "make" her students be more reflective about their writing process. Week after week the group and facilitator questioned her or any teacher's ability to "make" that happen. Finally her assumption that she had that kind of control hit home. Rather than "making" her students learn, she began to talk about "helping" them. This change of language indicated a change of mind, and ultimately, a change in the way she worked with students.

> Even defining the research question forced me to confront my issues -- my issue of control. "How can I make my students..." versus "How can I help my students..." which casts me as more of a facilitator. It forced me to ask where else in my life I am doing that [trying to exert control]. Once I changed my questions from "make" to "help," then it helped me to put the onus on the students instead of all on me. [PT, Interview, 2/97]

A second teacher echoed this theme explaining her own tendency to internalize the system's expectation that it is the teacher's responsibility to make kids learn. In the past, she said, she used to "stew" in the guilt of kids'

failure to learn. Now, she says, the things that used to make her feel guilty and inadequate become food for thought in the context of the seminars.

> We are told [by the system] that we are responsible for making kids do things. [But] the old guilt trip m.o. results from no way or place to reflect. Now I don't stew. I can really learn from those issues I used to stew over. [LB Interview, 2/97]

Not only is she confronting her own assumptions and the assumptions that the system makes and imposes upon her, but the seminar acts as a lens that refracts those assumptions and transforms them into objects to be examined.[xi]

Although the process of reflection is structured and guided within the seminar, the teachers have begun to internalize it, and carry it with them outside the context of the seminar. Two of the teachers recently ran into each other at the local gym. One started talking about a problem she was having at work. The other immediately asked why things had to be that way, and began to challenge the sense the first was making of the situation. The second teacher explains:

> I asked her, "Does it have to be like that?" It's not a question I would normally ask of another teacher. But probing is an m.o. that we have in the group. Even though we weren't in the seminar, we talked about issues in the same way. [PT Interview 2/97]

The next phase in the process engages teachers in digging for alternative explanations about what is going on. "Why do you think this is happening?" we ask. In a recent session, a teacher was looking to understand and develop strategies for dealing with students' resistance to listening to directions. The group arrived at several explanations for why the problems existed: the eternal presence of TV, the teacher's own habit of repeating

herself such that students develop the habit of not listening the first time, the teacher's habit of catering to an "LD culture" where students with special needs have influenced the classroom procedure, and students' "self-centeredness" (which raised a whole new set of assumptions and why questions.)

This generation of explanations is a generation of local theory, as it were. A theory we have developed there, among ourselves. Over the years we have seen many cases. After a while themes begin to repeat themselves. For example, many of our teachers have special needs students mainstreamed into their classrooms. We have seen instances of success and of failure. This has given us the chance to begin to make connections beyond the specific cases themselves. Out of these collective cases has come our theory of concentric "circles of support." The circles consist of the teacher, the para-professional, colleagues, the principal, the parents and the state. We've discovered that when any one of these circles is weak, the whole structure is at risk.

But we also work with larger theories (for example, behaviorist or Rogerian theories of learning). The most familiar theory from the field is David Hawkins' "I-Thou-It."[xii] This has often provided a framework that helps us to organize our thinking when we're talking about the various dimensions of a problem. Other frameworks include Dewey's process of reflection,[xiii] Howard Gardner's[xiv] multiple intelligences, and Robert Kegan's[xv] orders of consciousness.

The next step in the process is to propose some strategies that would address the source of the problem.[xvi] This usually involves a mixture of questioning the teacher, "Have you tried...?" and offering ideas from one's own experience, as a way of asking, "Would this work in your situation?" (versus telling them to try X). *It is important to note that this is a process of inquiry rather than giving advice.* Strategies stem from explanations, and, in the case of students' not listening, mentioned above, ranged from tying consequences to the students' not listening (bad habits -- a behaviorist approach), all the way to engaging the students themselves in developing explanations for their behavior and strategies to remedy it.

Finally, the teacher has the opportunity to try out these strategies and report back to the group the next time. In Dewey's words, teachers begin to take "intelligent action." It is at this phase that theory and practice, reflection and action, begin to integrate.

The Outcomes: Strategies and a Sense of Perspective

The process of disciplined thinking, or reflection, as described above, leads to problem solving, or more precisely, the generation of insights and multiple strategies for addressing problems. There are a couple of things worth mentioning about these "outcomes." First, they are practical. Teachers not only gain insight, they gain ideas to put into practice. Secondly, the opportunity to make problems public lifts them out of the murky realm of the unimportant, into the light of significance. One teacher puts it this way:

> In my school life there's no forum for talking about things that really matter. So I isolate myself. When things are difficult I tend to pull back. People here respect you and make space for what matters. [MDB Interview, 2/97]

As this quote suggests, the most significant aspect of the seminar work is the *perspective* that it offers. According to preliminary data, this perspective took on six different forms. The first form, which I call *developmental*, is an outgrowth of the mixed nature of our group: six high school teachers and eleven elementary school teachers. As such, teachers get a sense of where students come from (elementary school) and where they are going (high school). One high school teacher comments:

> I get kids right out of eighth grade. It's very helpful to see them as part of a continuum. It makes me willing to extend myself. They haven't come to me fully formed. They come from different stages [of development]. [MC Interview, 2/97]

Another teacher adds, "It's a forum for thinking long term about kids' education." Teachers indicate that this kind of perspective on a person's development extends beyond students alone to one's colleagues, one's interns and one's self. One teacher says:

> It's thinking about things in a developmental way that's helped me with my teaching partner. Developmental issues have become more and more core. [PT, Interview, 2/97]

And another:

> Developmental issues come up everywhere. There's a [way] of looking at things that [implies a] span and fluidity. There is a sense that everyone is in process. This encourages patience with myself, with colleagues and with students. It's made me more tolerant of everyone. [MDB, Interview, 2/97]

A second kind of perspective, which I call *curricular*, is that of a child's learning over time. Because the interns all teach French or Spanish, we have the chance to see the evolution of the foreign language curriculum over 13 years. One teacher talks about how that knowledge has given her not only perspective, but the freedom to be more directive with her intern:

> If affects how I think about my kids' French lessons [with the intern]. It affects how I interact with my intern around the curriculum, knowing what will be expected in high school, knowing the format of the high school program. I can say to my interns: "You can push my students more." Knowing what they've had and will have. I have felt a freedom -- especially knowing that kids can test out of novice level language[xvii] -- that I could take some decisions about the curriculum. [MDB Interview, 2/97]

She feels connected to the high school, its language teachers and its language curriculum in a way that is unusual among elementary teachers. The same can be said about high school teachers relative to the elementary curriculum.

Still another sense of perspective, which I label *comparative*, is gained by seeing one's own experiences in contrast to others'. Two elementary school teachers in the group have a particularly difficult principal. For those listening to their stories, there is a certain comfort in knowing that things could be worse! "Listening to ____," says one, "I [realize I] don't have it so bad!" Another teacher comments that knowing the situation of others in the group has helped her to pick her battles.

> Wherever you are, [she says], you get enmeshed in your own dramas. The group has helped me to choose my battles. It puts my issues in perspective. Like when I came from the inner city and Vermont kids were "being bad." They'd put a tack in my seat and think that was really bad, and I'd just laugh! It gives

> you a continuum [on which to judge the size and importance of your own issues]. [PT Interview, 2/97]

A fourth kind of perspective I've called an *object*[xviii] *perspective.* Besides seeing one's own situation compared to others, one is able to get outside her own "drama" as the teacher above put it, and see it as object. Teachers gain distance on their teaching lives and on themselves. This perspective is very much linked to the process of confronting one's assumptions, discussed earlier in this paper. One teacher describes the jolt she felt when another teacher in the group helped her gain distance on her situation.

> I remember the issue of collaboration I brought to the group last year. I had a terrible [team teaching] problem. Someone said, "Why would you [stay in a situation like that]?" It was mind-boggling to think that way! I get so locked into "should." My team was a disaster. But I have such a strong desire to connect with my colleagues at work, that I felt I had to connect. [MDB Interview, 2/97]

The other teacher's question pulled her out of this vortex of guilt and desire, helping her to identify those feelings and to consider new options. As one teacher put it:

> [The seminar] liberates me to step back and to look at my teaching in a different way. [Interview, 3/95]

A fifth aspect is gaining a *theoretical perspective* on one's practice. One teacher refers to articles she has read in the seminar and makes specific mention of Hawkins' "I-Thou-It":

> I really like the articles. They gave me something more to think about -- they took me above it all -- provided a new dimension. Maybe there is not a *direct* impact [from the articles], but, for

example, the I-Thou-It becomes a filter. It's one of those things I can back up to. [PT Interview, 2/97]

Theory serves to filter, name and organize experience. It connects one experience to others, lending continuity and meaning to what otherwise might remain isolated and insignificant. We have found that the theories we use come from two places -- from ourselves and our own experiences, and from outside "experts" like Hawkins. An example of our own "local" theory is the "circles of support" mentioned earlier.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, teachers say that they carry around both an individual and a group perspective simultaneously (the *individual-group perspective*), where teachers suddenly feel "bigger than [themselves]." "You start carrying around a group perspective -- your perspective isn't just an individual perspective anymore." Besides slaying that teachers' albatross of isolation, it empowers teachers to act differently. One high school teacher with 25 years experience explains how it has given her the strength to hold on to her principles:

> Individually I can now hold onto my principles, knowing that they are also others'. By this time [in my career], without the support of the group, I may have given it up. I know when I speak from my principles that there are people I speak for other than myself. [MC Interview, 2/97]

A case in point: on March 23rd of this year a group of five of the mentor teachers, two interns, and two SIT faculty members traveled to Vermont's capital, Montpelier, to testify before the House Education Committee on the need for foreign language in elementary schools. We were not representing a school or a town but a cross-section of teachers who are

clear about what works and doesn't work in elementary and high school foreign language classes, why, and how the elementary and high school curriculum are continuous. We also presented the Partnership as a successful alternative model of professional development -- a model that might sustain not only Windham Partnership teachers but other teachers around the state.

These six dimensions of perspective -- developmental, curricular, comparative, objective, theoretical and individual-group -- indicate six important ways in which teachers have reframed their experience. The next section describes the supportive context in which these perspectives and the process of reflective thinking, have been nurtured.

Community, Support and Accountability

The growth described above does not happen in a void. It happens in a strong community of experienced professionals that offers support to its members, and demands accountability of them.

The Community

Even though the 17 teachers involved in the Partnership come from ten different schools and eight different towns, there is still a great deal of familiarity among them. Brattleboro, the largest and most central of the towns, is known by all the teachers, and many of them have taught in more than one of the eight town schools. But community in this case means more than just a shared locale. There are a number of things that make this community of teachers vibrant. Again and again in interviews, teachers cited

the experience their fellow teachers bring to that seminar room. With an average of 21 years in education, and an impressive 400 years total, it is not easy to ignore each others' stories and opinions. In fact, it's a gold mine, and the teachers recognize that.

Compatibility is not a given in any group, of course, but, as one teacher has noted, "We think the same and support each other in the big picture." Another adds, "We're a self-selecting group." While teachers do not think *exactly* the same, there is a general commitment to progressive and humanistic approaches. Other factors that serve as mortar for this group are a vibrant sense of humor, food that we bring and share, and, perhaps, the fact that for the past three years, the group has been all women.

Support

Support is evident in a variety of forms, none of them surprising. Primary among them are respect and trust. The respect is in large part due to the number of years of experience we each have. A number of the teachers commented on this:

> "People here respect you."
> "I don't feel judged."
> "When you know it's your turn to present, you know people will really listen."
> "Your turn is always honored. It's the closest thing to Prospect[ix] that I know."
> "[From] the very first year I felt valued and supported."
> "It's important that we're all veterans."
>
> [Interview 2/97]

This kind of respect and non-judgment engenders trust and the courage to risk. In addition, over the years this trust has not been violated, and has

therefore grown. This stands in contrast to the climate found in many schools, where exposing one's questions or doubts, and asking for advice is often seen as a weakness. As Rosenholtz and Kyle note in a 1984 article discussing barriers to professionalism,

> [T]here is the sense in isolated settings [schools] that to seek advice from other teachers is to admit, at least to some degree, a lack of teaching competence. The offering of unsolicited advice is equally poor etiquette, because it implies that the advisor possesses greater teaching competence. In other words, teachers do not generally approach each other with requests for, and offers of assistance because those actions convey, undeservedly, an aura of superiority or inferiority.[xx]

In addition, there are no "turf" issues to contend with since teachers come from different schools. Unlike faculty meetings where, as one teacher puts it, "there are always politics of some kind, always doubt about where people are coming from, and whether they're pushing their own agenda," the seminar offers a politically neutral environment.

The kind of support found in the seminar is energizing. The seminar nourishes teachers, rather than draining energy from them. And the more energy there is, the more there is to give to each other, further strengthening the community:

> The seminar feeds me. I get energy so I can give my energy to others, instead of [having to] conserve it for my own place. At 4:00 [when teachers arrive at the seminar] I'm just a hollow shell. I look terrible -- sunken cheeks, pale, awful -- we all do. But I leave with energy and new ideas. [MC Interview, 2/97]

Energy and support are also essential in meeting the challenges that the seminar puts before teachers. As several teachers remarked, it helps in facing the "hard stuff:"

"It gives me the courage to look at things I might not otherwise look at."
"It's easy to see [a problem] as all my fault but with the group that feeling really levels out."
"The seminar helps me to separate out my own foibles."

Support also comes in the person of the facilitator who takes responsibility for "holding the whole." At its most elemental, this means keeping time and keeping people on a reflective track -- facilitating the rigorous work of reflection (versus "chatting" or "musing"). But it also includes weaving in theory.

> [The facilitator] serves as an anchor. I don't drift. [She] is a source (though not *the* source) of knowledge and expertise. [She's] willing to share and include [that] -- willing to put things into an intellectual perspective. There isn't any other place that happens in my work. [PT & LB Interview, 2/97]

Another aspect of holding the whole means remembering what happens during a session and from week to week. Weaving seemingly unconnected threads into a somewhat coherent piece of material (with ragged edges), helps to create meaning.

> [The facilitator] says, "Remember that X said..." -- tying things together and bringing in the intellectual thread...she pulls the pieces together. [LB Interview, 2/97]

Teachers also indicate that "the stories of [the facilitator's] own teaching and supervision are very helpful." I would add that the facilitator "helps to make the unimportant important." That is, those "little things" that come up in teaching -- like students' not paying attention -- become important aspects of the story of teaching and learning, worth spending our time looking at. While having a representative of the university there to affirm teachers'

stories is not the only way to legitimize them, it does provide the perspective of a voice from "the field."

Accountability

The final factor of contextual support is accountability. The fact the seminar exists within the container of the Windham Partnership is critical to its success. First, it justifies the time teachers must spend to be involved, and helps them justify it to colleagues, administrators and family -- all of whom are jealous of teachers' time. As one teacher remarked, "You can't get something for nothing. You do have to pay a price." And this price is the extra time mentors must spend. Not insignificantly, they are also paid for that time by the Partnership ($700).

Second, the Partnership and the payment it provides (meager as it is) means that the Mentors are held accountable. They are accountable to the Partnership, to the interns and to each other.

It is important to note here that reflection is not a natural act. It does not come naturally or easily to any of us. Accountability, then, becomes the beams which support the structure of reflection, without which the work of reflection might collapse. Given all the demands on a teacher's (or anyone's) time, reflection is work that might otherwise fall by the wayside without that kind of accountability.

The Windham Partnership also provides us with a *raison d'être*. If we were just a group of teachers coming together to talk about our teaching, I'm not sure we would last. The Partnership provides an It that binds us, and

gives us a purpose beyond ourselves and our individual lives -- our work is a service to the profession rather than something which might otherwise feel like an indulgence, or an extra. Rather it all becomes integral to our work lives.

Finally, because teachers are not accountable to something that they have to be a part of, but *choose* to be a part of, commitment is high. Teachers have agency, responsibility, and control over their own participation and course of development.

Questions, Problems and Next Steps

We recognize that this paper paints the Partnership as something with many fewer flaws than it actually has. Of course, it has many. But the purpose of the paper was to begin to probe the ways in which teachers' thinking has been affected by their work in the seminars, and to identify some contextual supports. How the Partnership might better support teacher development is the subject of another study.

This study is only preliminary. The initial findings presented here indicate that a disciplined reflective process in a supportive community, leads to a shift in teachers' perspective. Such shifts in turn hint that a change in practice may follow. In addition, teachers leave the seminar with energy, with new insights into teaching and learning, and ideas to apply in their class room the next day. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, they are part of an on-going community of reflection and practice that is sustained by its members and the Partnership within which it is contained.

Much more work needs to be done to understand the different ways in which teachers thinking is affected by the seminar. The data gathered through observation and video tapes has yet to be analyzed. We would like to provide teachers with the means to begin recording their own observations of how their thinking about their work has been effected, especially as it happens, in the context of school.

Many questions remain. Among them are these:

- What specific links can be made between the shifts in perspective that happen in the seminars and teachers' practice? (Preliminary data indicate links exist.)
- What specific links can be made between the shifts in perspective that happen in the seminars and students' learning?
- How have teachers' shifts in perspective affected their institutions? Their communities? Even their state?
- What are the elements that help to create trust and support in a group?
- Is there a critical size to the seminar? Some teachers wondered this year, with seven new mentors, if we had exceeded an "optimal number."
- Are the mentor teachers, who self-select, already "reflective practitioners?"

We are always learning in the seminars. Here we are beginning to learn about how that learning happens and the effects it has beyond the seminar itself. As one sixth grade teacher remarked, "You are reminded that you are always beginning at something. The seminars keep me at a beginning."

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ENDNOTES

[i] See Rodgers, C. (1993) "Empowerment, challenge and renewal: Professional and personal development among mentor teachers in the Windham Partnership," unpublished paper, Harvard University Graduate School of Education.

[ii] Ibid.

[iii] Unlike the Troen & Boles model, the Windham Partnership does not create significant release time for elementary teachers. High school teachers do gain some extra time during the intensive phase of the internship. On the whole, however, involvement in the Partnership demands extra time from teachers.

[iv] Thanks to Margaret Dale Barrand, Linda Bourne, Linda Cassidy, Maggie Cassidy, Alice Charkes, Marcia Hansen, Claire Oglesby, and Kit Whallon.

[v] Dewey, John. (1916) *Democracy and education*, New York: the Macmillan Co., p. 76.

[vi] Ibid. p. 170.

[vii] ____. (1938) *Experience and education*, New York: Macmillan Pub. Co., p. 49.

[viii] Cited in Kegan, Robert, (1983) *The evolving self*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, p. 11.

[ix] This happens both within the "check-in" time, where we check in with each mentor about their work with their intern, or in the convening time, where a teacher presents a "case" to the rest of the group.

[x] Dewey sees the first step of the reflective process as a spontaneous interpretation of experience, often based on an emotional reaction. He advocates not leaving emotion behind, but beginning to objectify feelings along with other data from the experience. This process is referred to as intellectualization:

> In every case where reflective activity ensues, there is a process of *intellectualizing* what at first is merely an *emotional* quality of the whole situation. This conversion is effected by noting more definitely the conditions that constitute the trouble... [1933, p. 109].

[xi] Thanks to Donald Freeman for this image.

[xii] Hawkins, David. (1974) "I-Thou-It," in *The informed vision and other essays*, New York: Agathon Press,.

[xiii] Dewey, John. (1933), *How we think*, Boston: D.C. Heath and Co.

[xiv] Gardner, Howard. (1983), *Frames of mind*, New York: Basic Books.

[xv] Kegan, Robert. (1995), *In over our heads*, Boston: Cambridge University Press.

[xvi] My way of describing this process in steps is somewhat misleading. The process is more or less directional, but not necessarily linear. Explanations may be offered early on, for example, but they become more refined the more a case and a teacher's assumptions are understood. Similarly, assumptions appear all the way through the process.

[xvii] The Brattleboro Union High School Language Department has developed a curriculum that allows entering students to go immediately to the appropriate language level -- novice, intermediate or advanced. Students may stay for more than one year in a level, depending on their progress.

[xviii] The term "object" is taken from the work of Robert Kegan, who has written extensively on adult development. He describes "object" as "those elements of our knowing or organizing that we can reflect on, handle, look at, be responsible for, relate to each other, take control of, internalize, assimilate, or otherwise operate upon. All these expressions suggest that the element of knowing is not the whole of us; it is distinct enough from us that we can do something with it." [1995, p. 32]

[xix] The former Prospect School and current Prospect Center, directed by Patricia Carini, has worked with teacher groups all over the country, and comes from a philosophical stance similar to the Partnership's.

[xx] Rosenholtz, Susan J. & Kyle, Susan J., (1984), "Teacher isolation: Barrier to professionalism," in *American Educator*, Winter.

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THE WINDHAM PARTNERSHIP

TOWNS, DISTRICTS, SCHOOLS, MENTOR TEACHERS, AND STUDENTS

Brattleboro (WSESU)	Dummerston (WSESU)	Putney (WSESU)	Westminster West (WNESU)	Marlboro (WCSU)	Wilmington (WSSU)	Guilford (WSESU)	Vernon (WSESU)
BUHS: 4 Mentors	Elementary: 2 Mentors	Elementary: 2 Mentors	Elementary: 1 Mentor	Elementary: 1 Mentor	High School: 2 Mentors	Elementary: 2 Mentors	Elementary: 1 Mentor
Academy: 1 Mentor					Elementary: 1 Mentor		
Students:	Students: 250	Students: 250	Students: 40	Students: 80	Students: 100	Students: 100	Students: 100

TOTAL # TOWNS: 8

TOTAL # SCHOOLS: 10

TOTAL # DISTRICTS: 4

TOTAL # TEACHERS: 17 (Each intern has one or two mentors)

TOTAL # STUDENTS: 900

Figure 1